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THE RÔLE OF FRANCE IN MUSICAL ART

By JEAN HURÉ

CELTIC SONG

WHOEVER has dwelt in the French countryside, especially in the west and centre of France, and more particularly in Brittany, has been surprised and delighted to hear the peasants singing melodies which are most often admirable, having a very individual character and in no way reminding one either of so-called classic music or of that which is popular in the industrial quarters of our great cities.

Those who attend our Catholic churches will instantly recognize the melodic inflexions which characterize the ancient songs of the Church, the Gregorian cantilena, or plain-chant.

To be sure, the rhythmic style of these popular songs differs from that of our liturgical chants, whether these latter be executed in the free rhythm which the Benedictine Fathers of Solesmes call "rythme oratoire," or sung in long-sustained tones with certain monotonous rhythmic formulas—a dotted note followed by a note equal to the dot in value, according to the fashion of some fifty years ago.

The popular songs are most frequently *metrical*, rarely *symmetrical*, hardly ever strangled by *rigorous* rhythm. Sometimes they wear a free and well-balanced guise that faintly recalls the antique alleluias, but with fewer ornaments and less buoyancy.

But the modalities of the songs of France are strictly conformed to the ecclesiastical modes of medieval music. In these songs one never finds oriental chromaticism or oriental excess, one never meets with the minor mode embellished with a leading-note, one never notices those modulatory turns and harmonic symmetries (expressed or understood) so common in the folk-songs of Germany, Holland or Ireland.

Now, any one who has travelled in oriental countries has observed that the most ancient songs, preserved by muezzins, rabbis or popes, have scarcely any affinity to the ecclesiastical

modes. Wherever found, they are ornamented with chromatic melismata, and affect intervals not employed in the Gregorian or Ambrosian chant. They recall Byzantine music, Greek chromaticism, and the Hebraic vocalises whose influence has been preserved, in the Christian art of the middle ages, by the admirable Gregorian alleluias.

The same applies to the cantilenas (*malagueñas*) of the South of Spain, so strikingly modified by Moorish art.

On the other hand, certain Irish songs remind one of our old French monodies, and are, consequently, constructed on the medieval modes.

In the absence of more positive evidence, the above facts would indicate that the Celtic countries were the cradle of the musical art expounded and elaborated by the medieval theorists, who erected the ecclesiastical modes, emancipated from Hellenic subtilities and, above all, from oriental refinements. Brittany, in particular—where, notably on the coast, the people live in music—sings medieval cantilenas exclusively, constructed on the eight modes of plain-song. Even in Brittany very rare borrowings from oriental modes may be met with here and there, owing, undoubtedly, to foreign admixtures due chiefly to shipwrecks; but these borrowings are of extreme rarity. A Breton would be at a loss to sing chromatically, and certain turns of phrasing, even though diatonic, he would find absolutely foreign and impracticable.

We may assume, then—without affirming it—that French music exerted the greatest influence on medieval art.

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However, certain facts appear to contradict these assertions. For example, the Gallican school of the early centuries is characterized by a superabundance of embellished vocalises which remind one of the oriental chants. This need not occasion surprise. The fact is, that the French of the South were in a position to become acquainted with exotic music by reason of their incessant contact with merchants and mariners of the Orient. The simple Celtic song was, therefore, supplanted by this complex art which, in turn, made way for the Roman cantilena of soberer style and simpler; but this same Celtic song (differing in its simplicity from the Latin simplicity), was preserved in the country districts, as in Ireland, and not a trace of it is found elsewhere. It also differs from the tranquil hymns of the Greeks—whose modalities

bear a certain relation to the modes of plain-song—and from the Slavic songs, tinged with orientalism.

For the rest, one should beware—which one too seldom does—of placing too much confidence in the texts of the theorists, or even in musical manuscripts. These latter were written by educated musicians, and, frequently, but little in harmony with the popular spirit; besides, the theorists constructed their theories according to earlier works composed by musicians. The tradition more or less well conserved in the countryside therefore—despite inevitable deformations—bears testimony which must not be neglected.

DESCANT AND VOCAL ART DURING THE RENAISSANCE

Whatever may have been the rôle of the French people in the formation of the medieval tonalities, or, rather, in the invention of the melodies whence the theorists derived those modalities, it appears quite sure, according to most historians, that the musicians of France invented Descant (*Déchant*). Some assert that it was invented by the Celtic bards of Wales, who were taught by the French; but the most authoritative writer on the subject, the German musicographer Johannes Wolf, considers it to be of French origin.

Descant was not, as is foolishly taught, a sort of improvisation based on various formulas applied haphazard. On the contrary, it was a marvellously systematized art, out of which issued the entire science of counterpoint; it was the ancestor of the whole scheme of modern harmony. Coming after the aberrations of the *Organum*, which—(except in England, if one may trust John Scotus Erigena, who describes it as a contrapuntal art founded chiefly on contrary motion)—was a purely mechanical and rudimentary way of writing polyphonic passages of decidedly in-harmonious effect, Descant, whether simple or embellished, was controlled by exact and perfectly musical rules.

In simple descant the counterpoint (*déchant*, *discantus*) ascended when the melody descended, and vice versa; figurate descant consisted in highly embellished musical garlands developed above the *cantus firmus*, or tenor; further on, other voices joined these two principal ones.

It was at Notre Dame in Paris that this new musical science was first cultivated, and thence it spread throughout Europe. It opened the door to the contrapuntal epoch of the Renaissance, which, above all in France and the Low Countries, was to shine

with incomparable brilliancy. We know what admirable masters then won celebrity in France and served as models to the musicians of all the nations. To none are the works of the erudite Josquin des Prés unknown, so astounding in their structure, their imaginativeness, their depth, so replete with unsurpassable ingenuity; everybody knows that Goudimel founded, if not in fact, at least through his influence, the School of Palestrina. The works of Jannequin, of Mauduit, of Claude le Jeune, and of many another, would be popular in France even at the present time were they but produced frequently and, above all, with precise observance of the style suited to their performance.

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC, AND THE ART OF THE LUTANISTS

Whether by delving in ancient documents whose collation is often inconvenient, or by perusing the works of Jules Écorcheville, H. Quittard, or Pierre Aubry, one may gain an idea of the importance of instrumental music in France during the middle ages and under the Renaissance.

To the instruments of percussion and with plucked strings, to the flutes, the organ, to the various species of chalumeaux and trumpets of all sizes, already in use before the Christian era (and some of them coming down from remotest antiquity), are now added the harps (the Celtic *crwth*), the cromorne (a reed-instrument now wholly in disuse), the trombones, the *Positif* (a small portable organ), the simple *vièle* and the curious *vièle à clavier* (hurdy-gurdy), which was possibly the most popular instrument from the twelfth to the fifteenth century; and, finally, the lute, a kind of guitar of exquisite sonority and considerable compass, probably of Egyptian origin, later overspreading Italy and Spain, and, in the sequel, all Europe, and France in particular.

There is no question to-day that these instruments had been employed from the earliest times to sustain vocal melodies, to play the *ritournelles* of these latter, to execute dance-tunes (*estampies*, *ducties*, etc.); they played a similar part in the execution of the Organum, which was quite as much an instrumental as a vocal art.

But to France is due the glory of having written, for instruments, musical works which displayed their resources and their character, and which, on account of their range and general arrangement, were impracticable for voices. Indeed, on comparing instrumental works by the Italians and Germans during the middle ages and the Renaissance with those produced in

France within the same period, there will be found this striking difference: The former exhibit pages which would evidently sound well whether performed vocally or instrumentally; the latter, pages of an ingenious virtuosity that in no way reminds one of vocal counterpoint.

From this point of view, as well as from many others, the French lutanists, more especially, were notable innovators. As forerunners they had had the jongleurs, the trouvères and the troubadours. These last were not always poor vagabonds, begging from château to château, as is too often imagined. Some of them were even noble lords, such as Guillaume, duke of Aquitaine (eleventh century), Bertrand de Born (twelfth century), Guillaume de Machaut (fourteenth century), with many others.

They preceded by a century the German Minnesänger, whose compositions, be it noted, were remarkable.

They accompanied themselves, or were accompanied, on divers instruments, in particular the lute, more extended in compass than the *vièle* and more readily transported than the *positif*.

Thus it came that the instrumental ritournelles formed the beginning of an art of genuine virtuosity which, developing in every land, attained to incontestable superiority in France.

To be sure, one can hardly overrate the practical work of the German lutists, or the already brilliant and cleverly written pages of the Italians; but one searches these composers in vain for the elegance, the perfection and the inspiration characteristic of the French lutists.

It has not seldom been my experience, after having played compositions by Dufault, Pinel, Guesdron or Mésangeau (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) on the organ or piano, to be asked whether the number just performed were not one of those graceful pieces that J. S. Bach interpolated in his suites. The Italian and German works could never produce a similar illusion. Their entire construction is clumsy and involved; through it all one feels the heavy vocal counterpoint of earlier ages; the periods follow one another or interlock awkwardly; the melodic and harmonic lines are wanting in easy fluency.

Quite apart from the æsthetic effect—an effect disputable in its very essence—it is beyond a doubt that the art of the German and Italian lutists did not contain even the germ of the purely instrumental writing of a Couperin or a Bach; the French lutists, on the contrary, were partially possessed of the secret of this delicate art. In Pinel's compositions the running parts cross

each other freely; the harmonies are apt to find expression in arpeggio-form, spreading over the entire range of the airy instrument; there is nothing to remind one of contrapuntal vocal writing. The same qualities are in evidence in Dufault and Guesdron.

THE HARPSICHORDISTS

It was probably this French school of lutists which influenced the English virginalists. The virginal, known as early as the sixteenth century, and frequently called "l'échiquier d'Angleterre" (the chessboard of England), was a very small stringed instrument with keyboard. The forerunner of the harpsichord, it was favored by gifted virtuosi who were sometimes picturesque and original composers; like the eccentric innovator John Bull, Gibbons, Byrd, and several others.

But the harpsichord and clavichord, of wider tonal range than the virginal and richer in combinations of timbres (the harpsichord had a plurality of keyboards, and various registers which modified its tone-quality and permitted the doubling of tones in the higher or lower octave), caused the small English instrument to be forgotten.

In France, the harpsichord was held in the highest esteem. Champion de Chambonnières, in the seventeenth century, proved himself a master of the instrument. He was the leader of our school of harpsichordists, and likewise a remarkable organ-player, like all the harpsichordists of that period. He composed delightful numbers for his instrument which are still heard with pleasure, and trained numerous pupils; among them Anglebert, a musician well-versed in the art of counterpoint, and a charming and clever composer; also Couperin and Crouilly, who will find mention below.

However, the most notable harpsichordists of the time were the Couperins. (Further on we shall speak of divers highly talented organists who also displayed their musicianship on the harpsichord.)

The Couperin family originated in the French province of La Brie, and provided the church of St.-Gervais in Paris with a galaxy of very noteworthy organists who were chiefly known to contemporary fame by their skill as harpsichord virtuosi and the charm of their musical works. Louis Couperin (d. 1665) and Charles Couperin (d. 1669) were not without merit; but they may not be compared with F. Couperin, *sieur de Crouilly*, or, more especially, with Couperin le Grand (François, the son of Charles).

This master, by virtue of his little pieces for harpsichord alone, without resorting to great ensembles wherein choral and orchestral masses are skilfully combined, attained to a perfection which warrants his elevation to a place beside the greatest masters of all times. His works are fraught with absolute beauty. Although written in the extremely ornamental form of the epoch, they are wholly free from artificiality, neither do they show the slightest ineptitude in form; everything is plastically beautiful, all is necessary, nothing superfluous; from first to last the characteristic musical idea, realized with the most elegant facility. Here I can only repeat what I formerly wrote: "There has never been a more perfect composer. With an inspiration equal to Scarlatti's he combines greater sobriety, variety and good taste; he writes with the same correctness as Frescobaldi, who displays less dash and boldness. In his works one finds everything—every emotion, every mood; for he is a master of psychology and description. His four books for harpsichord (which still await a modern publisher in France) ought to be read again and again; they are incomparable, and when J. S. Bach himself attempted to imitate the great master's style, he failed pitifully, despite his assiduity, his science, and his genius, as he had failed in the imitation of the Neapolitan, Alessandro Scarlatti. But it must not be imagined that this last phrase was written with the intent to detract in any way from Bach's redoubtable genius; on the other hand, it is only fair to render homage to the great French master who often served him as a model, whom he admired, and who is slighted more especially in France."

Rameau, whose far-reaching fame we shall speak of further on, was also a talented harpsichordist; like Couperin le Grand, he wrote an instruction-book for the instrument, in which may be found a clear explanation of certain technical principles which might still be studied with profit. (Couperin's finger-technique greatly influenced that of Bach.)

THE ORGAN-SCHOOL OF THE XVIITH AND XVIIITH CENTURIES

Titelouze may be considered—neglecting his predecessors, who for the most part were still unskillful—as the founder (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) of the school of organ-playing in France. On reading his works one is quite willing to believe that he, like the German Froberger, was a pupil of Frescobaldi, being only twenty years older than the latter. More probably, he was his teacher. In fact, the Italian master published as a

young man, and while Titelouze was still in the prime of life, works written (as he himself avers) in the French style; and these works strongly resemble those of Titelouze. This latter, indeed, like the majority of French composers, produced a rather limited number of musical works. These are, for the rest, most imposing in their serenity, which sometimes touches the sublime; they are not without a certain monotony, at least for our ears, accustomed to the seductive diversity of more recent organists; the inspirations of Titelouze are of a somewhat abstract sublimity which is apt to weary contemporary auditors who are too little inclined to dwell on such heights, and who suffer from vertigo in regions so inaccessible to the vulgar.

Titelouze—so his historian, M. Pirro, informs us—had pre-science of modern music and the opera; he developed the technique of the organ and its rôle in the ritual, where till then it had served chiefly to sustain the voices.

In his works one cannot fail to notice the then novel employment of dissonances and modulations in a very bold and at the same time perfectly logical manner.

His style is still reminiscent of vocal counterpoint, although much modified in accordance with the tonal and technical resources of the organ. He well knew how to frame impressive entrances of the polyphonic parts.

He was not the pupil of any master; he taught himself by studying the early writers, and by reflection. A man of profound learning, he was sought after for expert examinations and for specifications for new organs, as well as for opening them.

He was also a (very mediocre) poet, and an excellent prose-writer. Below is a paragraph cited by M. Pirro, in which Titelouze brings forward some ingenious ideas concerning musical æsthetics:

Comme le peintre use d'ombrage en son tableau pour mieux faire paraître les rayons du jour et de la clarté, ainsi nous meslons des dissonances parmy les consonances, comme seconde, septième, et leurs répliques, pour faire encore mieux remarquer leur douceur: et ces dissonances se font ouïr supportables, bien appliqués et à propos.¹

Titelouze was organist and canon at the church of St.-Jean in Rouen; he trained numerous pupils, among them A. Raison and Marchand. The thorough instruction which these two

¹As the painter uses shade in his picture in order to throw into relief the radiance of day and the light, so do we mingle dissonances among the consonances the better to bring out their suavity; and these dissonances affect our hearing as tolerable, well applied and apt.

received from their master is revealed in their elegant and chaste style of writing, which is, nevertheless, particularly in Marchand's case, very different. It displays an affinity for that of the lutists and harpsichordists, who seem to have been quite unknown to, or ignored by, Titelouze. They possess more imagination than their master, far less profundity, and a grace, vivacity and gayety whereof no trace is apparent in the austere canon of Rouen.

Marchand was a harpsichordist of distinction, who had an opportunity, in Germany, to enter the lists against J. S. Bach. Overawed by the colossal erudition of the German master, he took to flight, although he had already won enthusiastic plaudits beyond the Rhine. In France he enjoyed the highest repute as an improviser and virtuoso on the organ and harpsichord.

André Raison, whose gifts appear much more remarkable, knew no such triumphs. Still less esteemed, though perhaps more estimable than Raison and decidedly more so than Marchand, was the pure and elegant F. du Mage.

Couperin de Crouilly wrote a book of organ-pieces in which there is, so to say, not one mediocre page. He excelled especially in short pieces, versets and preludes, which he imbued with an astounding variety and fancy. His sober and elegant style is never embarrassed by a seeking after effect or by needless details; his offertories exhibit a clean-cut form unexampled in works of earlier date.

Gigault can hardly be so unreservedly praised; this musician, learned and industrious as he undoubtedly was, abounds in sterile and unhappy thoughts, paired with a dismal rhythmic monotony; none the less, it must be admitted that he was a highly eccentric innovator.

These masters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were, besides, adventurers who did not fear the boldest innovations. Roberday (who lived in the seventeenth century, and concerning whom biographical data are wanting) wrote caprices and fugues whose conception is sometimes erratic, which are replete with curious details, refined to excess, and frequently of a profundity that recalls Titelouze and Frescobaldi.

Wholly different was the amiable Clérambault, an author full of grace, gayety and charm, to whom, however, the Remigian Nicolas de Grigny might be preferred. Him Bach admired and gladly imitated, copying his organ-works with his own hand. This great master is in very deed one of the glories of France; with an impeccable style he combines a science in development, a depth and diversity of inspiration, a wealth of melody, a plasticity

of phrasing, and an harmonic inventiveness, which make him the peer of the greatest composers.

I have been at some pains to insist on the gayety, grace and tenderness of these composers for the Church; surprise may be expressed, in certain quarters, that such emotions could find room in temples for the celebration of the divine mysteries. They did so because the early masters, both in the middle ages and during the Renaissance, as well as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, did not feel that gloom and austerity were *de rigueur* in the House of God. They conceived religious music to be the Beautiful in tones, in its every manifestation, presented as an offering to the Divinity. Their robust and wholesome faith found musical charm and gayety congenial, herein resembling the sculptors of the middle ages, who ornamented the churches with figures sometimes outrageously grotesque, like those painters and decorators who covered the partitions in the cathedrals with gay colors and resplendent gilding, and ironwork overlaid with gold.

Divine service was then *a festival in the church*; one who forgets this fundamental truth can have no understanding of Catholic art—at least down to the nineteenth century, at which epoch it becomes, with some few exceptions, lachrymose, grandiloquent, or mawkish.

This brief digression was necessary to explain and justify the marks of interpretation which teem in the organ-books of the masters whom I have mentioned, and their contemporaries; in them one often finds the words *gayement, joyeusement, tendrement, très vitement*.

As a matter of fact, this entire school of organists was the inspiration of those great German masters who in their assiduity constructed works of longer breath, more imposing for the vulgar, more accessible to the semi-educated musician, and—to give them their due—of great beauty, but in which the erudite and delicate artist rarely finds the infinite charm of a Clérambault, the impressionistic loftiness of a Grigny, the profundity of a Titelouze.

THE THEATRE

It would be inaccurate to state that the French created the lyric art of the theatre. Indeed, from the earliest ages, in Greece and among the civilized peoples of the Far East, the dithyrambs and tragedies were accompanied by vocal and instrumental music. The works of Eschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were chanted. But it is no less indiscreet to affirm that the Italians were the

creators of the lyric theatre. Of a surety, they have shown themselves inimitable on the stage; but in France, long before Italian opera, the Mysteries were in full flower.

These were theatrical representations of the principal occurrences in Holy Writ. At the outset they were performed in the Christian temples, later in the public squares. In them, vocal and instrumental music took a leading part; songs of the people mingled with liturgical chants, choruses with soli and instrumental ritournelles played by lutes, vièles, organs, cornets, cromornes, flutes, harps, and a considerable number of instruments of percussion.

It was during the Renaissance that secular opera originated in Italy as an ingenious amplification of these Mysteries, and embellished with a music which, then a novelty, was a reaction against the complicated counterpoint of the Netherland School.

But from the middle of the seventeenth century the French endowed the lyric theatre with an unexpected type. Cambert was its chief promoter, and the Florentine Lully, who passes for the creator of French opera, was merely the imitator of the old master.

Cambert, a pupil of Chambonnières and an organist and harpsichordist of talent, while drawing inspiration from the very real genius of contemporary Italians, penned numerous scores possessing a clarity, richness, sobriety, and a correctness in declamation, which may be sought in vain among preceding authors.

At about the same time Campra, Lambert, Lalande, and others, also won renown.

The glory of Lully eclipsed that of these well-nigh forgotten authors, some of whom were at least the equals of the celebrated Franco-Italian.

Opéra comique (comedy-opera) seems to have originated in France. Adam de la Halle laid its foundations with the *jeu de Robin et Marion* as early as the thirteenth century.

The assertion that Pergolesi was the first modern master to write comedy-operas is sufficiently disputable. It implies a confounding of the Italian *opera buffa*—a genre in which the French were mediocre while the Italians wrought miracles—with the French *opéra comique*, whose leading characteristics were charm, tenderness, emotion without extravagance, and a well-controlled vivacity.

Duni, Philidor, Monsigny and Boiëldieu excelled in this specifically French style which was to present us with some masterpieces

in the nineteenth century: *Carmen*, by Bizet; *Mireille*, by Gounod; *Nanon*, by Massenet; and the incomparable *Phyrrné* of Saint-Saëns.

From the fact that the French showed themselves unrivalled in this ingratiating and attenuated art-style, must we conclude that they did not possess the lyric vein requisite for grand opera? Not at all. Rameau wrote lyric dramas which will always command the admiration of musicians, and which will achieve popularity just as soon as they shall be played, not with the wearisome monotony now affected in the performance of ancient music, but with the *exaggerated pathos* which was demanded in the theatre both in the seventeenth century and the eighteenth.

Rameau, earlier than Gluck, comprehended the simple grandeur in keeping with classic French tragedy. Any country but France would have extolled to the skies a master who was a great composer both for theatre and concert, a great virtuoso on harpsichord and organ, and a theorist of profound erudition, all in one. To him France preferred the German Gluck, certainly a man of great genius, but frequently wanting in tact and taste.

Although Méhul was not a puissant innovator, one cannot fail to recognize that he was a musician capable of influencing the French school, e. g., by his opera *Joseph*, in which there is a deal of delectable simplicity and dignity.

THE MUSICOGRAPHERS

The French are a musically gifted race; their folk-songs, more beautiful than the finest Slavic cantilenas, abundantly prove it; but nowadays our people are very ignorant in musical matters; they do not take this grand art seriously, they disdain what amuses them—wherein they are wrong—and, on the other hand, they neglect to study the technics and history of music under the pretext that where science enters in art is absent. Our most skillful and inspired musicians themselves are, in general, uninformed with regard to the mechanical and historical side of musical art.

It has not always been thus. During the middle ages, music was laboriously cultivated in France, as it had been of old in Greece and Rome. From the twelfth and thirteenth centuries our theorists, chosen most frequently from among learned monks, were possessed of a very wide general culture, mingling, with their musical science, philosophy and metaphysics, theology and mathematics. Among these didactic authors may be mentioned

Petrus de Cruce (Pierre de la Croix), Jean de Garlande, Francon de Paris, Jean de Muris, Philippe de Vitry, etc.

Coming down to comparatively recent times we meet with numerous theorists who treated of the harpsichord, the organ, and composition; but only in Couperin and Rameau do we find masters whose influence spread into every land, and whom we may look upon as beneficent innovators.

In passing, we have already remarked how Couperin's technique on the harpsichord influenced the art of Bach and his disciples. Rameau's work overpassed it by far in significance; it established the foundations of all harmony based upon the major and minor modes, it explained the rôle of the fundamental bass and its tonal functions, the laws of modulation. It is this system of harmony from which one may not depart without danger so long as one clings to the two classic scales, major mode and minor mode, which have supplanted—and all too meagrely, we must admit—the ecclesiastical modes.

The theory of Rameau, still taught at the present time with more or less modification in the conservatories of all countries, is totally inadequate when it comes to creating or analyzing modern works; it is therefore a dangerous element in the modern curriculum, though in its day it was necessary; moreover, it showed that its author, besides possessing musical gifts of the first order, wrought with a method, logic, and general culture, which were truly marvellous.

It would be a rather delicate matter to discuss the modern French theorists. Those who immediately succeeded Rameau were his colorless imitators; of those actually living, I shall say nothing but that I have opposed and shall continue to oppose their productions, puerile commentaries on Rameau's fine works, now fallen into desuetude and become detrimental. At this very moment, perchance, some toiler is framing a really sound system of theory for musical art; I should not be in the least surprised, nor should I be at all astonished if higher powers should attempt to paralyze his efforts.

Fresh musical essays by critics and chroniclers have appeared in France during every stage of progress; one may find curious bits of information in them, but prior to the nineteenth century historians were quite rare here as well as in all other countries.

The Parisian Bonnet, in the seventeenth century, was an amusing historian possessing a fund of learning quite unusual for the time, although very incomplete. In the eighteenth century, J. B. de Laborde wrote several most interesting historical volumes,

during the selfsame period when Padre Martini was penning his famous "Storia della Musica."

In the nineteenth century we find the names of Félix Clément, Coussemaker, Lavoix, Ad. Jullien, M. Brenet, etc. But it is only in our own epoch that historical researches based on authoritative evidence, and worthy of the unreserved admiration of our foreign colleagues, have been carried on in France; Messrs. P. Aubry, J. Tiersot, H. Expert, A. Pirro, J. Écorcheville, M. Emmanuel, Combarieu, Reinach, L. Laloy, L. de Laurencie, and many others whose names escape me at the moment, are learned investigators and, in some cases, excellent musicians; they have rendered the greatest services to the art, and their influence has made itself felt throughout the world of music.

Being a composer, it is difficult for me to speak, without incurring some slight suspicion, of our innumerable musical critics. Some of them have done *much good*; most of them have thought to do much harm. These latter are not invariably tiresome, and are found entertaining abroad, where their sallies and quips and quirks are copied. They have created a school of organized malevolence, of *rosserie*, as we say; this is one of the modes of manifestation most affected by impotent envy.

How amazing!—some of our critics understand music thoroughly; there are some who are even very remarkable composers.

Speaking of criticism, how avoid a quotation from M. Gauthier Villars (Willy, *alias* "l'Ouvreuse")?—"Criticism is good for nothing, and only in this point does it come near being literature."—Or this other one, from the learned *conservateur* of the Museum at Cluny: "Criticism nourishes him who does not produce; it prevents not him from living, who does produce; what more would you ask of it?"

It is an almost incredible fact that French historians, critics and theorists in general have, of one accord, treated French music, whether contemporary or ancient, with a certain disdain. With due reflection we may explain this phenomenon.

French music, with its clarity, its concision, its simplicity, its symmetrical proportions wherein everything harmonizes, in an impalpable manner defying analysis, to form a perfect ensemble; wherein the most complex, the subtlest elements are so closely blended that one cannot readily segregate any one from the rest;—French music is not a music for musicographers. Only a well-trained and thoughtful musician is capable of dissecting its component parts and exhibiting their beauty. The musicographer will find forage more to his taste in works where the structure of

the periods, the phrases and measures, the order of the modulations, the vivid contrasts in intensity, and the cumulation of contrapuntal parts, are instantly apparent. On such works—given a modicum of science, a very little patience, and a well-assorted vocabulary—one can build up endless disquisitions.

But how shall one analyze the charm of a Breton folk-song, or of a piece by Couperin?

A poet would save the day by telling of the sentiments expressed; but he could not tell us the tonal, the musical characteristics of such a work. To do that, he would himself have had to think, dream and write about music; to file and polish some musical phrase over and over again; to perceive for what reasons a melodic line is lovely or commonplace, why a chord is ill-distributed, why two chords are inharmonious in succession, why certain tonalities connect badly, why given rhythms halt; he must, above all, have fathomed the infinite mystery of *fusion* in the elements forming a work of art; finally, he must have lived long on incessant musical sensations, have dissected the works of the masters, have corrected the exercises of pupils, have corrected his own work—and, as a *sine qua non*, he must possess the innate gift of music.

Those musicographers are very rare who are endowed with all these qualities; there are some such; these frequently prefer French music to any other; they know that there is more *science* in a folk-song of Brittany or the Cévennes, in a cantilena by Rameau, or withal by the German Mozart, in *Gallia* by Gounod or *Phryné* by Saint-Saëns, than in a fugue by Bach, an *Andante* by Beethoven, the finale of the *Meistersinger*, or Strauss's *Salome*.

All this goes to show why French music occupies so small a place in French instruction, in French didactic books; why those who have attempted to rehabilitate this subtle art have found, more especially in France, irreconcilable opponents.

THE FRENCH PUBLIC AND FRENCH MUSIC

The foregoing remarks should not for an instant cause any one to imagine that the writer lacks appreciation for the admirable genius of a Bach, a Beethoven, or a Wagner, or for the peculiar inspirations of a Richard Strauss. Nevertheless, a French melomaniac would not be able to read what I have just written, without indignation. For much less than this I was considered, before 1914, to be a dangerous promoter of paradoxes.

The French public likes—or pretends to like—exoticism. There is no product—alimentary, industrial, æsthetic, or otherwise—which, if it be French, is not viewed with suspicion!

Any ballet-dancer possesses talent so long as she passes—even if born at Montmartre—for a Spaniard, Russian, or Dane; any style of architecture is delectable which was elucubrated in Munich or Vienna; any chocolate is superior if labelled Swiss or Dutch; all music must be Russian or Viennese, or Italian, or at least Spanish or even English; every virtuoso must be German—likewise every orchestral conductor.

Nothing can be done to oppose this—and nothing will change in this type of popular belief. No attention was paid to Goumedil, and little to Josquin; Palestrina imitated them—we adore him. Cambert was despised; Lully imitated him—we adopt Lully. We forget Couperin and Rameau, but we play Bach and Gluck; Meyerbeer, Wagner, Franck and Brahms dethrone Bizet, Gounod, Massenet, Lalo, Saint-Saëns; Messrs. Strauss and Stravinsky eclipse Messrs. Debussy and Bruneau;—and, in times to come, people will laugh heartily on learning that the French of the twentieth century preferred the *Lieder* (most of them very beautiful indeed, but some so dreadfully silly) of Schubert and Schumann to the melodies of Fauré and Duparc.

It is not in Germany, or in Russia, or in Italy, that the worst enemies of French music are to be found; it is not unusual to meet brilliant students or professors in our schools who have never read or played a page of Grigny, of Titelouze, of Couperin, of Rameau, of Chabrier, of Ravel;—I do not believe that one could encounter a similar phenomenon outside of France.

At this very moment the quartets, trios and symphonies of Beethoven are being played everywhere—and so they should be; but on no program (or very few) do I see the trios of Rameau, the ballets of Montéclair, the works of our harpsichordists, the suites of Massenet, the two graceful symphonies of Gounod.

FRENCH MUSIC IN THE XIXTH CENTURY, AND TO-DAY

The same reasons which prevented me from passing judgment on our critics induce me to avoid a lengthy appreciation of contemporary French music.

One might observe that, while foreigners have drawn invigoration for their art—often without losing their individuality—from the bourne of French music, the French owe many of their defects to stranger influences.

Do away with Rossini and Meyerbeer, and all our composers of the beginning of the last century are faultless; do away with Wagner and Franck, and many of our modern masters are directly Gallicized and refined; do away with the admirable Russian musicians, and the majority of our young composers will be rid of the faults which disfigure them.

The Frenchman may derive instruction from foreign schools, and extract therefrom elements of fertility; but it does not become him to imitate them.

Per contra, foreigners of all nationalities owe a great deal to Chopin and Gounod. For a long time astonishment has been expressed that I should rate Chopin as a French musician; true enough, he was born in Poland (though his father was French); one of his teachers was a German; and his works borrow their themes from Polish folk-lore.

All this is undeniable; but in his craft as a musician he is in no sense German, and his style, entirely new and absolutely individual, is essentially French. Whoever reads his works without prepossession will arrive at this conclusion.

Chopin influenced Wagner and Liszt and our whole modern school.

CONCLUSION

Here I end this essay. It is in nowise a résumé of the history of French music, for very many celebrated musicians have been disregarded; I have mentioned only a majority of those who, either individually or in groups, have played an important rôle in the universal history of musical art.

I trust that I have avoided Chauvinism and partisanship throughout; it would grieve me to feel that I had ruffled respectable susceptibilities; should I have done so, it was not my intention, and I shall be forgiven on calling to mind the dictum of M. Camille Saint-Saëns: "Though art may have no country, the artist has one." As to that, I do not feel quite sure that art has no country.

(Translated by Theodore Baker)